

Testimony Supporting SB 826 for Michigan Senate Education Policy Committee

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I thank Senator Phil Pavlov, Chair, and other members of the Michigan Senate Education Policy Committee for the opportunity to speak in support of SB 826. My testimony is based on my professional judgment and experience as senior associate commissioner in the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education from 1999-2003, where I was in charge of the development or revision of the state's K-12 standards in all major subjects, licensing regulations for teachers and administrators, teacher licensure tests, and professional development criteria. In addition, I reviewed all states' English language arts standards for the Thomas B. Fordham Institute in 1997, 2000, and 2005. I co-authored Achieve, Inc.'s American Diploma Project high school exit test standards for English in 2004. Finally, I served on Common Core's Validation Committee in 2009-2010. I have also written and published many articles, research reports, and books in the English language arts, serving as editor of *Research in the Teaching of English* (the major research journal for English teachers) in the 1990s.

In my testimony, I address:

- 1) Status of Common Core in Massachusetts
- 2) Pre-Common Core Performance of Massachusetts Students
- 3) Post-Common Core Performance of Massachusetts Students
- 4) Differences between Massachusetts' Pre-Common Core Standards and Common Core's Standards
- 5) Why Michigan Should Repeal Common Core's Standards and Replace Them with Massachusetts' Pre-Common Core Standards

1) Status of Common Core in Massachusetts

The Massachusetts Board of Education adopted Common Core's standards in July 2010 to replace its own 2000 mathematics standards and 2001 English language arts standards, chiefly for \$250,000,000 in Race to the Top funds. At the commissioner of education's request, the Board later voted to include with the Common Core ELA standards the Guiding Principles in the 2001 ELA framework and its two appendices of recommended authors (vetted in K-8 by the editors of *The Horn Book*—the premier children's literature magazine in the country). Also adopted later that year were a few additional standards in mathematics and ELA—to comprise the additional 15% the state was told it could add to Common Core's. These additions all appear in the 2011 versions of the state's mathematics and English language arts curriculum frameworks. The state's pre-Common Core science and pre-engineering standards were revised to some extent in 2015 but there is no clear information on how closely they align to Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Currently, a small number of signatures are being collected in Massachusetts to complete the legal process for a question on the November 2016 ballot that eliminates Common Core's standards and restores the state's pre-Common Core standards.

http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2016/04/19/grassroots-bid-scrap-common-core-from-mass-schools-faces-challenges/oLaIEpC5Z1GuYYrQbEDHN/story.html?s_campaign=8315

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2) Pre-Common Core Performance of Massachusetts Students

In 2005, Bay State students achieved first place on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests, in grade 4 and grade 8, in reading and mathematics, and they remained in or near first place on five consecutive tests in both subjects at both grade levels (2007, 2009, 2011, 2013, and 2015). All demographic groups improved. The Bay State also participated as a country in Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in 2007 and 2011, in both years tying for first place with Singapore in grade 8 science and placing among the top six countries in grade 8 mathematics, thus corroborating state results on the “nation’s report card.” In addition, most Bay State regional vocational/technical high schools (about 30, all with grades 9-12) now have high pass rates in mathematics and English on the state’s high school tests, an attrition rate that is close to zero, and waiting lists.

3) Post-Common Core Performance of Massachusetts Students

Since implementation of Common Core’s standards, average scores have declined slightly on NAEP tests; some declines have statistical significance. There are no increases in student achievement on other tests or in the percentages taking AP tests or getting scores of 4 or 5. The long-lasting gains from 2005 to 2015 may be attributed both to the quality of the state’s K-12 standards and to the changes in 1999-2003 strengthening academic requirements in licensure regulations for teachers and administrators, prospective teachers’ licensure tests, and professional development criteria for in-service teachers.

The following link is for a report on the slight declines:

<http://learninglab.wbur.org/2015/10/28/nations-report-card-shows-massachusetts-at-the-top-but-slipping/>. The following link is for a review of my book on the changes to the state’s teacher licensure regulations and licensure tests.

http://www.goacta.org/the_forum/from_the_bookshelf_an_empty_curriculum_the_need_to_reform_teacher_licensing

4) Differences between Massachusetts’ Pre-Common Core Standards and Common Core’s Standards

Basic differences start with philosophy. The goal of the 1993 Massachusetts Education Reform Act was to increase all students’ achievement. That was the aim of the standards, the changes in teacher preparation, and both student and teacher tests. We were not trying to close gaps—as Common Core does—by lowering the achievement of the top 50% and by trying to raise the bottom. In other words, our goal was not to reduce variation in achievement. The end result: all demographic groups improved, but the gains of lower-achieving students were accelerated.

The second major difference concerns the focus of the state’s ELA standards. The state’s English teachers wanted an emphasis on literary study. The lack of alignment between the Bay State’s ELA standards and Common Core’s can also be seen in the differences between the tests based on these standards (i.e., the state’s own tests and the Common Core-based tests). English teachers also wanted an emphasis on literary, not nonfiction, works in state tests (recommending a 60% to 40% distribution), as well as a stress on older rather than contemporary works. Differences between the reading, writing, and vocabulary test items in the state’s original tests (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, or MCAS) and in the Common Core-based practice tests for the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) are explained in a research paper published in the fall of 2015. <http://pioneerinstitute.org/news/testing-the-tests-why-mcas-is-better-than-parcc/>.

5) Why Michigan Should Repeal Common Core Standards and Replace Them with the Massachusetts Pre-Common Core Standards in Mathematics, ELA, and Science

The most important reasons for Michigan to repeal its Common Core standards are:

1. Common Core's standards are not rigorous and do not make students ready for a high school diploma, never mind authentic college coursework.
2. Common Core's standards lack a research base and international benchmarking. The "lead" standards' writers lacked background experience and competence for writing K-12 standards (David Coleman and Susan Pimentel in ELA, and Jason Zimba and William McCallum in mathematics). None had teaching experience in K-12, and there is no record that they used appropriately the feedback they received from hundreds of reviewers.
3. A K-12 mathematics curriculum tailored to Common Core's mathematics standards and tests does not support the strong K-12 science curriculum developed by the state's science teachers to address the state's pre-NGSS science and pre-engineering standards.

Michigan should replace Common Core's standards with the Massachusetts pre-Common Core standards because:

1. Massachusetts pre-Common Core standards in ELA, mathematics, science, and history/social science are the only sets of K-12 state standards in the country with empirical evidence to support their effectiveness. They are also among the few sets of K-12 standards thoroughly vetted by high school teachers and academic experts in the subject areas they address.
2. A statewide organization of parents, legislators, and others (www.endcommoncorema.com) has gathered enough signatures to place a question on the November election ballot that would repeal the state's adoption of Common Core's standards, restore its pre-Common Core standards, and provide guidelines for revising them in the future.
3. The costs for switching are minimal. The standards are free, and most of the original test items from 1998 to 2007 are free and available, requiring a company only to assemble them and handle logistics and reporting. Moreover, no extra professional development was needed by the state's teachers to teach to them. The lists of *recommended authors* by educational level in Appendix A and Appendix B in the ELA curriculum framework were approved by a large majority of the state's English teachers, and all test items were vetted by them.
4. State tests based on the Bay State's pre-Common Core standards evoked no complaints from parents or students, and took up much less preparation and testing time than Common Core-based tests seem to need. All used test items (except "anchor" items) were released annually and used by teachers for instructional purposes.
5. The content of all the Massachusetts pre-Common Core standards and tests was vetted by a number of academic experts, and standards were placed by the state's teachers at appropriate grade levels. They also participated in setting passing scores and performance levels, along with parents and legislators.